

# **GSA White Paper NS2020 Transition Strategy**

General Services Administration Integrated Technology Service

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## **NS2020 Transition Strategy**

## Summary

A Federal Agency telecommunications transition is a critical, complex undertaking that involves significant coordinated effort and expense. A successful transition must have senior executive support, effective collaboration, clear delineation of responsibilities, careful project planning, and a realistic timeline that is accepted by all participants. This white paper describes concepts recommended by the Network Services 2020 (NS2020) strategy to address these items. Note that these are high-level recommendations and subject to refinement or adjustments resulting from further planning and stakeholder engagement.

NS2020 is GSA's strategy for the next generation of telecommunications and Information Technology (IT) infrastructure services. As part of NS2020, the following key improvements to the overall transition process are recommended:

- **Prioritization**: To ensure that transition has the necessary priority, GSA recommends establishment of a senior level Transition Transparency Group to provide periodic updates to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Chief Information Officers Council (CIOC), and the Chief Acquisition Officers Council (CAOC).
- **Transparency**: GSA plans to lead an effort to define transparent acquisition and transition processes that include well known, enforceable transition deadlines and clear delineation of responsibilities.
- **Realistic schedules**: GSA will work to establish a realistic end-to-end transition schedule and milestones to allow all parties (Agencies, vendors and GSA) to collaborate successfully in a complex, multi-party environment. It is recommended that there by sufficient overlap between existing contracts and the new NS2020 contracts to allow a staggered transition.
- **Collaboration**: GSA plans to establish a broad-spectrum Government transition group that includes representatives from participating Agency CIO, CAO and CFO offices. This group will meet regularly to discuss and report on transition progress and issues. GSA also intends to establish a service provider (Industry) coordination and advisory group.

GSA plans to improve its approach to transition in a variety of ways:

- **Increased support**: Full lifecycle support options will be offered for each transition step, with a particular focus on steps early in the lifecycle, including significantly enhanced support for Statement of Work (SOW) and Request for Proposals (RFP) development.
- **Faster funding**: Transition funding will be provided earlier in the process.

• **Improved contracts**: The new portfolio will reduce contract overlap and entail an ordering process that supports the procurement of Agency-specific requirements in a more streamlined manner.

## **Background**

A Federal Agency telecommunications transition typically involves:

- Geographically dispersed locations
- The need to maintain continuity of service among all locations
- The need to maintain a consistent quality of service
- Proper lifecycle and business management of services
- Scheduling and completion of highly-synchronized service ordering, scheduling and testing prior to transition

Agency networks range in complexity and volume from several dozen locations for smaller Agencies to hundreds or even thousands of locations for larger Departments. In many cases, site surveys are required prior to transitioning services to a new vendor or contract, and site surveys are mini-projects themselves. They usually involve scheduling and prioritization, coordinating contractor visits and escorts, and documenting site specific information and requirements.

The impact of transition is often underestimated. Agencies must commit significant technical, operational, acquisition and financial resources while dealing with staffing and budget constraints, to maintain operations and simultaneously plan and execute the transition. Network transitions have evolved into overall IT management and operations that involve Agency Network, IT, Security and procurement offices, which further complicates the effort.

In order to comply with the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), Agencies must select a service provider through a Fair Opportunity process. In preparation for a Fair Opportunity, Agencies need:

- A complete and validated inventory (services, facilities and locations)
- An in-depth knowledge of usage and bandwidth volumes
- Growth forecasts
- Forecasts for technology refreshment and implementation of new service
- Special requirements

Agencies must also be prepared to manage their new services directly following a cutover, as well as services not yet transitioned.

In scope, transitions vary from straight like-for-like services that require ongoing support to very complex, large-scale technology refresh operations that may include mandates such as the Trusted Internet Connections (TIC) or a cloud migration. Successful transition is dependent upon concerted actions by all stakeholders, including OMB, Agencies, GSA and the service providers. Therefore, one key to success is ensuring that transition is a high priority for the Government. Senior CIO/CAO leadership needs to drive transition. A related key is collaboration across Government and between communities, such as IT and acquisition. To ensure successful intra-Agency coordination between IT managers and contracting officers, GSA's education programs and Government forums and working groups will include representatives from both communities.

#### **Transition Schedule Drivers**

Transitioning to a new telecommunications vehicle requires several phases that, to a large extent, must be performed serially. This requires a minimum overlap period between contracts.

The ultimate length of transition is subject to a number of factors. These include:

- Simultaneous transitions by many Agencies outpacing service provider capabilities
- Competing priorities
- Factors that extend Fair Opportunity schedules, such as highly complex technical requirements, multiple rounds of negotiation, protest adjudication and internal Agency decision processes (centralized or decentralized)
- Planning for multiple activities that depend on completing Fair Opportunity:
  - Developing an overall Transition Plan and schedule with buy-in from all stakeholders
  - Providing a complete, validated inventory to the selected vendor
  - Detailed vendor transition planning by location and service
  - Site surveys requiring physical access to sites by vendor personnel
  - Development and placement of bulk service orders
  - Coordination of commitment dates with local exchange carriers
  - Agency billing and other back-office system coordination
  - Systems enhancements needed to accommodate special needs
  - Internal Agency communications plan and change management processes
  - Bulk disconnect order execution and validation
  - Billing and other operations support system problem resolution
- Other factors, such as:

- Delays caused by new construction
- IP addressing administration
- Agency seasonal cycles (e.g., IRS tax season)
- The need to implement unanticipated special features or enhancements
- Clean-up of any orphan or un-inventoried services

#### How NS2020 Will Differ From Networx

#### **Networx Lessons Learned**

In a report to Congress dated December 2013 (GAO-14-63), the Government Accounting Office (GAO) identified key factors that contributed to delays in transitioning Agencies from FTS2001 to Networx. Networx offered significantly better pricing than FTS2001, and GSA provided significant support to Agencies in the Networx transition, including transition planning and extensive assistance. However, transitioning an Agency's enterprise network is complex. There are considerable costs, many moving pieces, and multiple stakeholders that have to work together. Delays increased transition costs and reduced Agency savings by extending the purchasing timeframe for the higher-priced FTS2001 services.

Among the many lessons learned GSA and its partner Agencies can take away from the Networx transition are that improvements are needed in:

- Project planning
- Executive visibility
- Coordination between IT and acquisition personnel
- Managing complex acquisition processes to avoid duplicative contracts
- Technical and contracting telecommunications expertise across Government and need for more GSA support

#### **Standard Transition Process**

To improve transition and address the GAO findings, GSA, in coordination with OMB and an inter-Agency Transition Working Group, will recommend a standard transition process and schedule that is clearly understood and accepted by all participants. This process will include a firm transition interval without the expectation of repeated contract extensions. Agencies and contractors will provide periodic reports on transition progress. GSA will provide user training on the acquisition and the program before and after award. GSA will also provide guidance to Agencies on project planning, including transition plans and associated timelines, as well as well-defined service delivery SLAs, improved GSA systems and inventory validation support, and enhanced transition support.

The process will include having Agencies define and describe their requirements prior to a well-known contract award date target. GSA will provide enhanced support for Agencies in developing Statements of Work in the form of standardized, customizable templates.

Proper transition planning would provide for a staggered approach in which:

- 1. Agencies do not attempt to transition at the same time
- 2. There is a realistic allocation of finite GSA, Agency and contractor resources
- 3. Agencies are provided the flexibility to use the NS2020 contract vehicles in ways that accommodate their budgets, telecommunications needs, and IT architectures
- 4. There is sufficient overlap between existing and future contracts to enable Agencies to transition in a manner that is coordinated with their technology life cycles and infrastructure modernization plans.

#### **Definition of Responsibilities**

A key to a successful transition is for all parties to clearly understand roles and responsibilities, to document these responsibilities, and to manage dependencies in the Transition Management Plan and the Agency-specific transition plans. The Networx lessons learned showed that some Agencies expected more GSA support than they received. GSA provided transition guides, support documents and checklists, but additional expert support was needed. Agency, GSA, and service provider responsibilities will be clearly defined in the standard transition process.

In addition to defining responsibility, transparency regarding transition progress is a must. The transition process and intervals must be understood and followed by all stakeholders. Government Agencies and contractors must provide open reporting on progress. It is recommended that a senior-level Transition Transparency Group be established to monitor progress and provide regular reports to OMB and the Federal CIO and CAO Councils, which will help maintain the needed executive focus on these efforts.

## **Support Services**

NS2020 will provide a variety of support services for all phases of transition. Resources, experience and skill sets vary across the Government, and a self-service contract support model is not sufficient for many Agencies. To reduce this potential impact on transition, GSA will provide avenues for direct transition support, either directly or via contractors through vehicles in the Advisory Services program area. The process for transition credit reimbursement will be overhauled to provide assistance to Agencies earlier than was provided for the transition to Networx. Such support could range from inventory validation to requirements development and

conducting Fair Opportunity evaluations. Lastly, enhanced systems will facilitate inventory management and service ordering.

#### **Service Provider Coordination**

In light of the crucial role that service providers have in a successful transition, GSA will establish a provider coordination and advisory group. This will help to ensure that service provider requirements and processes are taken into consideration, particularly in the area of operations support. This group will also provide input for the Transition Management Plan to avoid bottlenecks during the phased transitions.

#### **Government Shared Services**

Shared services made available through a single providing Agency can greatly reduce the complexity of procuring and managing those services for the customer. In many cases they may be provided as "turn-key" services. One delivery mechanism makes use of an Inter-Agency Agreement between the customer and the providing Agency, which then delivers the services via a pre-established contract vehicle. Such a mechanism, coupled with established, standardized Interagency Agreements or Memorandums of Agreement (including SLAs, where appropriate) can streamline transition. Agency procurement policies should recognize Government Shared Services as a viable option for meeting an Agency's telecommunications and IT infrastructure needs.

#### **Contract Improvements**

Most current Networx services will transition to the Enterprise Infrastructure Services (EIS) vehicle, which is the largest NS2020 acquisition. To improve transition and address the GAO findings, EIS will be more flexible and streamlined than its predecessors:

- The NS2020 Strategy will consolidate contract vehicles to reduce overlap.
- The ordering process will entail delegating procurement authority to Agencies and allowing task orders to contain Agency-unique CLINs. This has the potential to reduce the number of contract modifications and accelerate the overall service delivery timeline.
- EIS will include Labor CLINs with pre-defined and pre-priced labor categories that are within the scope of the contract. This will improve contract flexibility and meet the need for tailored solutions in an efficient manner.
- EIS will contain improved SLAs coupled with improved SLA tracking enabled by an enhanced ordering, billing and inventory systems.

• Future task orders would extend beyond the base contract with staggered intervals, reducing transition priority conflicts and improving response from GSA and the vendor.

### **Proactive Transition Preparation**

Preparing for transition is an integral part of the NS2020 Strategy. These transition activities will occur in several phases that include proactive measures to enable a relatively smooth migration of services:

- Transition Planning has already begun. This phase includes establishing a
  Transition Working Group, recommending a standard process, developing
  Statement of Work (SOW) and Fair Opportunity templates, developing a
  Transition Management Plan and transition handbook, creating a
  methodology to compute transition credit reimbursements, defining
  transition tracking metrics, and customer education.
- Direct Transition Preparation is targeted to begin approximately a year before the new EIS contracts are awarded. It includes implementing the customer education program and developing Agency requirements, including drafting task order statements of work. Commencing such activities prior to contract award is essential to the timely completion of the overall transition.
- The final **Transition** phase includes making Fair Opportunity decisions, ordering the services, and transitioning the services.
- **Inventory Management** is a crucial aspect of transition. Agencies, with assistance from GSA as needed, should continuously manage and validate service inventories. This should not be viewed as a one-time event during a set transition period.

#### Conclusion

Following an in-depth analysis of the transition to Networx, GSA has developed significant improvements to its support offerings, including full lifecycle support options, earlier transition funding, improved contracts with enhanced support for SOW and RFP development, and better scheduling. In addition, GSA is establishing processes to ensure that transition has the necessary executive priority, realistic schedules and milestones, greater transparency, and an environment that promotes collaboration. GSA looks forward to working with its customers and service providers to achieve a successful transition to NS2020.